

necessary for us to suppose that the Macedonians were conscious of their need—the history indicates that the reverse was the fact. But their sin and misery, which only the Gospel could relieve, was the burning want which God revealed to Paul, and its cry was, “Come and help us.”

11. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came. From this verse on the writer is evidently an eyewitness of what he relates. In the opening words of this history it appears that the writer is also the author of the Gospel According to Luke. Modern criticism has offered us nothing on the authorship of the Acts which is at once so natural and simple, and so satisfactory to the lover of clear truth, as the traditional testimony of the Church that it was written by Paul's companion, “the beloved physician,” before the martyrdom of the great apostle. We know no other solution of the question of authorship which merits serious investigation. The devout critic adjudges them all to be forced, unnatural, and inconsistent. **With a straight course.** The favorable wind which brought the missionaries to Macedonia in so brief a time—“the next day”—is stated as a happy fact which inspired them with confidence. But it was not the favoring breeze that determined for them their conviction of the divinity of their mission. That was already done by the Spirit and the vision. There is undoubtedly a sense in which all nature is in accord with God's great purposes in the world, and he who would be sheltered by great Nature must keep his feet in the path of Right. But it would be perilous to poise our conscience like a vane to the shifting winds. The disciples, sailing in obedience to Jesus's command, were “buffeted by contrary winds.” On another occasion it took Paul five days to make this same voyage (Acts 20. 6). In the line of duty he was once hindered by protracted storm and shipwreck. We are not to be deflected from duty by adverse events in our outer life. Blind Milton was in accord with Paul when he sang:

“Yet I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward.”

13. We sat down, and spake unto the women. Not because women have the stronger affinity for lessons of purity and truth, but because at that time male Jews were banished from the colony. The place of women in the Gospel history is peculiarly significant.

Thoughts for Young People. On the Opening of the Human Heart.

1. Often God opens our hearts very gradually and gently. Over and over again sinners have been called to God by such a sudden manifestation of his power as shocked Paul into Christianity, but not many human beings are so startled by

divine truth. Most of us have heard it and have been largely affected by it from our cradles, and so the work of God becomes in many cases a gradual work. Lydia first of all probably had tried to satisfy her soul with the rites of paganism, and in her yearnings after goodness up to a certain stage of her spiritual life she may have got good even from sticks and stones. But God opened her heart too wide for the idols to fill and she embraced Judaism, and united with devout Jewesses in the services of the Lord at the riverside. Judaism at its worst was superior to paganism at its best, but Judaism at its best was too narrow for one whose heart God had opened; there still was a great aching void, and when the Gospel was preached she gladly passed over from the religion of aspiration to the religion of satisfaction. In all this she is a type of many of the present day.

2. But sometimes God's work on our hearts is neither gradual nor gentle. Paul in his early days had so stiffened his nature and cast it in the mold of Judaism that when the word of God would come to his soul it had first to break it in pieces as a hammer breaks a rock. Further on in this chapter (in our next lesson) we read a story of a very different conversion, that of the jailer. His conversion was the work of a brief hour, a very terrible hour; nothing gradual or gentle about it. And there are conversions of that sort also in the present day.

3. But the power of the Spirit of God is equally manifested, whether it grinds the heart to powder like a hammer, or melts it as the fire melts wax. Either way the change is quite real, and the seeker after God should pray for God's method: for the hammer if God sees that he needs to be smitten, but for light and heat if they will do.

4. True conversion is evidenced by conduct. Lydia was forthwith baptized. She was not ashamed to make a public profession of the new religion. Neighbors talked in those days as in these. And as this woman had changed from idolatry to Judaism, and now was about to change again, what a subject for gossip she would be! But notice this, that she constantly changed in the direction of goodness. It is not necessary for a soul to be consistent with itself; it is necessary to be consistent with God. It is not necessary to be consistent with the past; it is necessary to be consistent with the light which one at the present time enjoys.

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

As Paul is moving about southern Europe we find him in a number of cases in what he speaks of as a “colony,” which according to Roman usage was very unlike what we usually intend when we speak of a modern colony. A colony as it appears in the